In a Traditional Sense

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/30669698.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham & Abigail Hobbs, Abigail Hobbs & Hannibal Lecter, Chiyoh/Margot Verger
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Abigail Hobbs, Jack Crawford, Alana Bloom, Chiyoh (Hannibal), Mason Verger, Margot Verger, Will Graham's Father
Additional Tags:	Enemies to Friends to Lovers, Friends to Lovers, Fake Marriage, Fake/Pretend Relationship, Eventual Romance, Eventual Smut, Murder Husbands, Murder Family, Post-Episode: s02e13 Mizumono, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Eventual Happy Ending, Major character death - Freeform, Not Will or Hannibal or Abigail, Abigail Hobbs Lives, Slow Burn
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-04-14 Updated: 2022-01-29 Words: 18,425 Chapters: 5/?

In a Traditional Sense

by karatekid1018

Summary

A canon divergence from S2 E13, Mizumono. Will asks to leave with Hannibal, and Hannibal never stabs Will. Now on the run with their surrogate daughter in tow, they're ready to start their new lives as a family, albeit an untraditional one. But Hannibal has always enjoyed tradition- and he's willing to go to drastic lengths in order to protect what's his.

OR The "Fake Marriage AU" where Hannibal asks Will to marry him for legal reasons, and maintain their status as a married couple and Abigail's fathers in their new life as a cover. What could this possibly lead to?

Chapter 1

“Where is he?”

A stupid question, really. Will didn’t need to ask- he could smell him. He didn’t need to see the look of hesitant concern in Abigail’s eyes to know Hannibal was standing behind him, just close enough to catch perfuming whiffs of sweat and coppery blood- Hannibal’s, Jack’s, maybe even Alana’s. When he turned, slowly, he took him in with increasing clarity: his hair mussed, his skin glistening with sweat and marred with various cuts and newly forming bruises, and his typically pristine dress shirt wrinkled and stained a light red. He’d walked into a home that, unbeknownst to him for a time, had always been a source of chaos and strife, but it was an entirely different ball game to experience it while fully lucid. No burning brain or seizures could explain away what he saw: Alana, her spine likely broken, an unknown pool of blood spilling out from beneath the pantry door, Abigail alive and well despite every piece of evidence to the contrary, and Hannibal, even more battered than after his fight with Tobias and yet still on his feet, still determined to end the night as the victor. And had he just listened to Will, he *would* have.

“You were supposed...to *leave*,” he hissed quietly, unable to let his eyes settle on any one part of Hannibal for more than a second before his mind would be assaulted with questions- whose blood is that, where is Jack, are you injured, whose blood is that, *whose blood is that-*

“We couldn’t leave without you,” Hannibal finally managed, his eyes holding onto Will’s with an unflinching gaze. Will felt his breath stutter as they maintained eye contact, and for one short, indulgent moment, he let his eyes slide shut as his mind reached out for Hannibal, the pendulum swinging as it always did as he analyzed the look in his eyes. Where Will had so often in the past encountered the blank mask of vague personhood that Hannibal presented to the world, there was now a gapping in the seams that bared the chasm of his existence for only Will himself to see. There was longing there, a feeling that he couldn’t help but shy away from, as if his body could not manage to contain it within himself. There was also, shockingly, insecurity- the singular knowledge that for once, Hannibal Lecter was entirely unsure of exactly what would happen next. But more than anything, like an acrid, burning cloud of smoke filling his lungs and threatening to choke the life out from within him, there was *betrayal*. His eyes flew open, and though he’d never been particularly skilled at understanding the feelings of the living, he knew in that moment there wasn’t a single thing that Hannibal could hide from him.

“I’m sorry,” he bit out, nearly a whisper, his hands trembling at his sides. “I...I didn’t mean for it to get this far. I didn’t mean to...Christ, I don’t even know what I meant to do.”

He expected Hannibal to be angry, despite having never truly seen him give in to such a *debased* emotion like rage. He expected his life to end in this kitchen, and for a moment, he wondered what trophy he would take from him, what kind of *feast* Hannibal would prepare to remember him by. But instead, Will was met only with a questioning tilt of Hannibal’s head, his eyes reflecting the usual curiosity that so often drove his actions.

“Perhaps what you meant to do no longer matters, Will,” he mused, daring to take one step closer and slightly close the gap between them. “But the question remains...what do you mean to do now?”

Fuck, that was the question, wasn’t it? Jack was clearly barricaded in the pantry, likely about to succumb to his injuries, Alana lay injured and immobile on the front step, and Abigail stood behind him, silent as the grave he still expected her to be in. A teacup that dared to come back together, and two more still threatening to shatter beneath his feet. The decision...should be harder. He should be feeling his mind threatening to tear itself to shreds over the right course of action. But when Abigail stepped forward and placed her hand delicately at the base of his spine, comfortingly, *pleadingly*, he knew there was simply no other path to take. Hannibal Lecter would end this night as the victor, and Will would be by his side.

“Let’s go,” he whispered softly, as if he worried the ground beneath him would give way as punishment for his crime. But when the floor held solid, and all he could feel was Abigail fisting her hand in the hem of his shirt, he let the security of his decision strengthen his voice. “*Let’s go*. Wherever you’re planning on going, take me with you.”

Hannibal’s silence in the following moments was so deafening it bordered on painful, and the only thing keeping Will grounded in that moment was Abigail’s hand on his back and, when he spared a glance down at her, the relief in her tearful smile. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the entire situation, he couldn’t help but give her one back, letting one hand come up to lovingly cup the back of her head.

“You’re gonna tell me about...well, everything, right?” he asked, his voice tight around the sudden lump in his throat at the feeling of her, warm and delicate and *alive* beneath his fingertips.

“You know we will,” she responded with equal emotion, leaning into his fatherly touch with the relief of a once-abandoned daughter. “We will, right Hannibal?”

At that, Will let his gaze snap back to Hannibal, who watched them both with rapt attention, despite his silence. The smile he’d given Abigail fell into a concerned frown as he watched the gears turn in Hannibal’s mind, struggling with decisions, weighing his optio- no...rearranging his plans. He could see it in his eyes, a spark of hope and relief that would grow to an inferno once the correct plans had been made. Will let relief wash over him, as hot and fresh as if Hannibal had stepped forward and slit his throat to bathe him in his own blood, but twice as satisfying. Hannibal had accepted Will’s proverbial outstretched hand, there was no doubt about that, but...he needed to hear him say it. He could see it in his eyes, could see past the torn stitching of his person suit to understand his mind as readily as anyone else’s, but he wanted the voice that had so often tormented him be transformed into his present source of peace. After what seemed to be both a moment and an eternity, he turned to them with sureness in his eyes.

“Yes, darling,” he replied, stepping forward to place one hand on her shoulder. “We will tell him everything. But for now, we need to take care of a few things before we get as far away from here as we can.”

“Take care of a few things, huh?” Will asked, letting a hint of a teasing smile grace his lips. “I guess I should be the one to ask, then- murder, or mercy?”

For the first time since Will came face to face with him that night, Hannibal smiled. A reserved little thing, a barely there upturn of the corners of his lips, but it was more than enough for Will to know that no matter what, this was going to work. The two of them, the *three* of them, were going to work.

“Well, I made a promise to our Alana, and I am nothing if not a man of my word. And even if you tried to talk me out of it, dear Will, she has already seen Abigail, and we cannot allow the world to know that she lives. The secret must die with her.”

Will nodded, letting the thought of it rattle around in his brain. Alana, the light leaving her eyes, knowing that she’d lost Will, Hannibal, and her own life in a single evening. It wasn’t pleasant- Alana, despite the multiple ways she’d failed him, was a good person, and had it not been for Abigail, he likely would’ve scolded Hannibal for letting such childish notions of promises and personal integrity guide his hand and convinced him to leave her on the step for the paramedics. But now, with Abigail alive and well and an irrefutable need to keep that fact a secret, there was no other option but to put Alana out of her misery. He looked down to Abigail, who only gave him a solemn nod- Alana had always been good to her, but they all knew damn well that she wouldn’t keep her mouth shut.

“Yeah,” he agreed gruffly, not trying to put too much thought into the fact that Alana was now experiencing the last few minutes of her life. “And Jack?” At that, Hannibal gave him a knowing smile.

“Have you ever heard of the Lioness of Britain, Will?” he asked. Will couldn’t help but roll his eyes.

“Is this really the time for a history lesson, Dr. Lecter?”

“It will be brief, I assure you,” Hannibal chuckled. “Her given name was Jeanne de Clisson, a 14th century pirate who made a habit of capturing French ships and slaughtering their entire crews, leaving only one man left alive to deliver a message to the King- that he would be next.”

Will quirked an eyebrow, sparing a glance down at Abigail who returned it with an amused grin. No doubt she’d received the brunt of Hannibal’s cultured ramblings during her time in hiding.

“And so, what, Jack is going to be our messenger?” he asked.

“Quite so.”

“We don’t exactly have a King to threaten, Hannibal.”

“No, we don’t,” he agreed, and suddenly, Will could see a fiery passion burning in his eyes. “We have the entire world. When Jack Crawford tells his story, they will all know- to seek our destruction is to ensure their own. Do you understand, Will?”

He did. *God* he did. He let Hannibal's fire rush over him, consume him, fill him with the same righteous fury he'd felt the night he nearly shot Hannibal in that very kitchen. They'd disappear tonight, together, and leave Jack behind so the world would know what awaited them should they try to intervene. He couldn't speak, could barely *breathe*, so he simply nodded and hoped that Hannibal could feel how Will had walked wholly into his fire and made it his own. By the look of fondness that had overtaken him, he was sure he had.

"Good. Then we are in agreement. Abigail, go collect your things from upstairs- Will and I will only be a moment."

She nodded, though was slow to part from them, taking Will's hand to give it a brief squeeze before retreating to the foyer, making sure to avoid the puddle of blood nearly blocking the exit. Now, with only Will and Hannibal left, the tension that had previously abated returned full force, like a punch to the jaw. If he'd not known any better, he would've thought Hannibal had let his anger loose on him, but they both remained still a few feet apart, Hannibal's gaze trained just below his line of sight.

"...Why now?" he finally asked. "I offered this to you, if you recall, only a few days ago. If you'd taken it then, Jack would be uninjured. Poor Alana would live to see another day. Yet you continued down your path to betray me, only to change course at the very last moment. Tell me why."

It stung, and it was meant to. Hannibal wanted him to understand that this all could have been avoided if Will hadn't been so hellbent on imprisoning him, a perfectly fitting act of revenge. Of course, Will could argue that had Hannibal not given him a reason to lust after revenge so strongly, they might not have ended up in this mess, but he knew better than to waste time arguing over whose poor decision making was responsible for landing them where they were. Hannibal wanted to know why- and Will would tell him.

"Because you're my friend," he said gruffly, forcing Hannibal's gaze to meet his own no matter how uncomfortable it made the both of them. "And because I've never known myself as well as I know myself when I'm with you."

It's a satisfactory answer. He can see it in Hannibal's expression, a flicker of relief, but also a flicker of disappointment. Satisfactory, but not what he'd been hoping for. They'd unpack that another day, when life wasn't so completely uncertain a thing for the both of them.

"Very well. The majority of Abigail's things are stored at another of my properties, as are a new wardrobe for you, new documentation, and new technology that won't be so easily tracked. We'll make it there before midnight, and then have some time to come up with the next course of action. But we'll need to get moving soon, before Jack can get reinforcements hunting for us. Are you prepared for what comes next, Will?"

Alana. Alana was what came next.

He could take the coward's way out. Pawn her off on Hannibal, avert his eyes while he stole the life from her...but he couldn't. He *wouldn't.* Had he given in to what he truly wanted, Alana would be allowed to live. Heartbroken, of course, and likely enraged beyond belief, but still breathing. He thought back to Bev- his coworker, his *friend*, dead because he sent her

sniffing after Hannibal's trail knowing damn well the danger it caused. He wouldn't do the same thing to Alana- if it was his fault that she had to die, he wouldn't abandon her to the mercy of Hannibal Lecter.

"Yes. I am."

He didn't check to see if Hannibal was following him. He walked with determination, knowing a moment's hesitation would likely deter him from his course of action, and reached the wide open front door and Alana's broken, crumpled form at the base of it, surrounded by shards of glass with rain pouring down on the scene from above. They didn't have much time, which was good- she deserved the mercy of a quick death. He took a steadying breath and stepped forward, standing over her enough that she could see him.

"Will," she croaked miserably, clearly desperate to reach out for him but unable to lift her hand, whether from pain or paralysis Will wasn't sure. "D...did he…"

"I...s-sorry," he offered, meagerly, knowing it wasn't enough or what she deserved, but still, he wanted her to know.

She had the decency not to question it, not even to beg. Will almost wondered if she'd fallen unconscious from the pain, until he saw the tiniest of wobbles in her lower lip. He didn't want her to cry- he wanted her at peace, away from all this, away from Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter. Making sure not to avert his eyes, he grabbed her head in both his hands and snapped her neck without another thought, the sickening crack reverberating through him like a rung bell. Her lip no longer wobbled. This was his design.

Letting out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding accompanied tears he hadn't realized were coming, his entire body wracked with sobs as he took in Alana's lifeless form. He clutched at her shirt, soaked from the rain and now from the tears dripping down his cheeks as he buried his face into the fabric, murmuring every apology he could muster into it as he prayed desperately that she was somewhere better, somewhere warm and dry, where broken men didn't ruin lives and the names Will and Hannibal wouldn't reach her ears. If they had the time, he'd bury her, give her the respect she deserved, but as he felt Hannibal come up behind him and place a comforting hand on his shoulder, he knew his time was up.

"She didn't deserve this…" Will said brokenly, managing to let go of her and rise to his feet despite the overwhelming feeling that he deserved to be dead and rotting next to her.

"You're right," Hannibal agreed, though if he felt any sorrow over her loss, it didn't grace his features as he stared down at her. "But many who die do not deserve it. If we must grieve, dear Will, it will be on the move. Come- we'll take my other car."

Will knew he was right, and yet tearing himself away from Alana was proving difficult. This was truly the first time that Will wholly and completely regretted having to take a life- which said more about him than he'd care to admit at the given moment- and while it rattled him to his core, it was something he'd simply have to come to terms with while they fled. There truly was no turning back now.

Hannibal led him to his detached garage, finding both the Bentley and a large Range Rover that he'd never seen before.

"I didn't even know you *had* a Range Rover," Will said, still shaky, but feeling better the further away he got from Alana's body.

"No one does, except for our dear Abigail," he replied, fiddling with the keyfob before Will heard the telltale click of the doors unlocking and the trunk popping open. "It best suited my interest to have a car purchased under an alias that no one would attribute to me. If we left here in the Bentley, they'd no doubt find us within an hour or two. Make yourself comfortable, and I will go check on Abigail."

With that, he was gone, leaving Will alone in the garage. Without a second thought, he climbed into the passenger side of the car, happy to find there was a comfortable seat and plenty of legroom waiting for him. The adrenaline of the night's activities was quickly being flushed from his system, leaving him droopy-eyed as he waited for Hannibal and Abigail to join him. If they had, he didn't know- exhaustion overcame him before they left the house, his eyes slipping shut to the gentle drizzle of the rain.

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When he finally came to, the sky was still dark, though the full moon shone brightly overhead as the car came to a gentle stop. He hadn't even realized it had been moving until it wasn't, the car parked in front of a strangely geometric looking house placed on the edge of a cliff. It was so unlike Hannibal's home in Baltimore, and yet still unmistakably a house that he would own, and as Will squinted in the darkness, he could see Abigail making her way through the front door, clearly familiar and at home here. Rubbing at his face and grimacing at the feeling of his scruff, he waited a moment to collect himself before climbing out of the car and following the cobbled path to the door, finding Abigail pouring three glasses of wine in the kitchen just off to the side from the foyer.

"I figured we could all use this," she offered up sheepishly, leaving one glass sitting on the counter and bringing the other two to the living room. Will followed her slowly, letting himself take in the view from the wall that was truly one large window overlooking the sea. He imagined it'd be even more of a sight in the morning, if they're still there when the sun rises. Smiling down at Abigail, he took his glass and lifted it to his lips, letting the sharp tannins and burn of the alcohol rush over him like Hannibal's fire had seemingly not too long ago.

Hannibal.

"Where is he?" he asked for the second time that night.

"Showering. Didn't want all that blood on him for much longer," she hummed nonchalantly. Will had been lifting his glass for a second sip, but paused, his lips just barely grazing the edge. Slowly, he lowered it, letting his gaze meet hers.

"You've changed," is all he said, somewhat stupidly, but it's all he could think of. Abigail simply shoots him that same knowing grin she's always had, though it matches the look in

her eyes much more than it ever used to.

“Hannibal doesn’t think so,” she retorted, taking a large sip from her own glass. “He says I’ve ‘merely become who I was always destined to be’.” And God, her impression of his accent is enough to have Will doubled over with laughter, nearly crying from the force of it. He could hear Abigail’s little giggle just barely over his own guffaws, and for the first time that night, he felt absolutely nothing but the fullest, purest joy.

“You’re something else, you know that?” he mused, letting the weight of his fondness, no, his *love* for her settle fully in his chest, carving out a space for her between his ribs so she will always be with him, always safe. He moved to wrap an arm around her shoulders, relishing in her warmth as evidence that she was truly there and not some ghost borne from his own grief. “...Does Hannibal let you drink wine?”

“On special occasions,” she retorted with a wry smile. “I think tonight could classify as special, don’t you?”

“Yeah,” he huffed, shaking his head fondly. “I guess it does. In any case, it’s not like I have any say in what you do. I’m not your dad.”

She’s silent for a moment, pondering what to say next, before she looked up at him, those lovely blue eyes sparkling with a similar fondness to his own.

“You are,” she said matter of factly, not letting him break eye contact with her. “You have been for awhile. Even when you didn’t know it, even when you thought...you were always my dad. And I missed you *so much.”*

He could hear the tears catching in her throat, and that only brought him closer to tears himself. Not being able to stand looking her in the eye any longer, he pulled her in close, letting her bury her face in his chest while he pressed a loving kiss to her hair, holding her tight the way his father did to him when he was young and scared.

“I missed you too, sweetheart,” he said roughly. Though there was nothing he wanted more than to make up for lost time with his...*daughter,* he was growing rapidly unsure of how to progress, his voice taking on that rushed tightness it always did when people made him nervous. “Finish your wine and then go get some rest- you have a room here, right?”

She nodded against his chest and he could feel where the tears soaked through, but he didn’t mind even for a second. Sniffling, she pulled back, taking a long, slow gulp of her wine before smiling up at him.

“I think I’ll go do that now, then. I just heard the shower shut off, so I’m sure Hannibal won’t be much longer. Just...don’t give him too much grief yet, ok? He always did what was best for me.”

And then with a soft nod, she was off down the hall, presumably to her room. The room where Hannibal had hid her away all this time, letting him believe he’d killed her.

Don’t give him too much grief yet, ok?

Sighing, he shook it off, letting himself push those thoughts out of his mind. They could tackle all of *that* at another time- but if Will was going to be well-behaved, he needed something stronger. He wandered back to the kitchen, exploring the room and rifling through cabinets until he found what he was looking for- Macallan, aged 20 years. He poured himself three fingers of the dark amber liquid, letting the pleasant notes of caramel and oak fill his nose before he tilted his head back and downed it all, comforted by the familiar burn spreading through his chest. It was only when he'd swallowed his last gulp that he felt a new presence in the kitchen with him. Preparing himself, he turned to see Hannibal, hair still damp and falling across his forehead and dressed in what seemed to be burgundy silk pajamas. For a moment, they were both silent, analyzing each other's body language with keen eyes.

"...I see you've already helped yourself to my whiskey," Hannibal finally said, bringing a wry smile to Will's lips.

"Well, if we're now sharing a life and a daughter, I'm operating under the assumption that what's mine is yours and what's yours is mine," he retorted, moving to pour himself another finger for good measure. Hannibal only smiled fondly, pulling out a stool from the counter and taking a gentle seat, resting his cheek against the palm of one hand.

"Is that what we're doing, then?" Hannibal asked. "You seem quite sure of yourself. Quite possibly more sure than I've ever seen you."

"I am," Will admitted, leaning back against the cabinets across from Hannibal. "You're my friend, Hannibal. Despite *everything* that's happened that should make me think otherwise, I care about you. And we can give Abigail the life she deserves, even if we're not a *traditional* set of parents." There's something in Hannibal's eyes as he said that that Will just couldn't quite place, but what he *could* see was the cogs once again turning in Hannibal's brain, as if he's rehashing plans in his head. "...What?"

"You say we are not parents in a traditional sense, and indeed, you are right," Hannibal mused, reaching out for his own glass of wine and relishing in his first sip. "However...I believe that conforming to tradition in this situation may be beneficial for all of us."

"...What are you saying?" Will asked, genuinely unsure as to where he was going with this. He couldn't help but feel uneasy at the self-satisfied grin that grew across Hannibal's face.

"Marry me, Will."

"...You must be out of your mind."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Hannibal pleads his case. Will answers an important question.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Marry me, Will."

"You must be out of your mind."

"On the contrary," Hannibal hummed entirely too casually for the fact that he just proposed marriage to a man he once framed for murder. "I've been told in the past that I am quite sane."

"Oh yes, I know you have. Dr. Sutcliffe said you were the *sanest man he knew,*" Will scoffed, turning to pour himself yet another finger of whiskey because honestly, the fact that Hannibal expected him to entertain this line of thinking while he was still legally sober enough to operate a vehicle was *asinine*. "And people you've never proposed to, I'm assuming."

"You assume correctly," Hannibal retorted, still wearing that pleased little grin. "In all 45 years of my life, I've never once considered taking a spouse."

Will believed him, at least partially. Knowing Hannibal to be a man who surrounded himself with all the beautiful things life had to offer, he suspected that perhaps some time in his past, he'd let his mind wander towards thoughts of marriage. Before the world proved itself to be an ugly and wretched thing where to love something is to ensure it will be taken away from you, he can imagine little Hannibal, a rosy-cheeked child cherished by a family he never expected to lose, daydreaming of growing up big and strong and having a loving partner by his side that he could hold dear all the days of his life. Will pondered for a moment if after the fact, when he was lying awake at night staring at the crumbling ceiling of his orphanage, if it was the first and only time Hannibal Lecter felt like a fool.

"So what, you've suddenly changed your tune? You want me to make an *honest man* out of you, Dr. Lecter?" Will asked, incredulousness weighing down his words like an anchor in the sea.

"I assure you, Will, there will be nothing honest about this arrangement," Hannibal replied nonchalantly. If he continued to dance around the point any longer, Will would almost expect to hear accompaniment by a string quartet in the distance. "What I'm proposing is moreso for our legal benefit than any attempt at intimacy."

Will looked at him curiously over the rim of his glass as he took a long, slow sip of his whiskey, letting the burn comfort him enough for his mind to listen carefully to Hannibal's words, rather than simply tuning him out like he normally would in an uncomfortable situation- and this truly *was* an uncomfortable situation for a man who'd just murdered his most recent *attempt at intimacy* . He knew what Hannibal was suggesting, of course, and was only mildly annoyed that he'd chosen such a gauche manner of proposing it just to catch Will off guard. He hated it when Hannibal found him *entertaining*.

"You're trying to cover our asses in case we get caught," Will said, smirking at the way his own bluntness made Hannibal grimace. Serves him right for batting him around like a cat with a yarn ball.

"I may have put it more mildly, but yes," Hannibal sighed, letting one finger trace the delicate rim of his wine glass. "Should Uncle Jack ever catch up to us, as my husband, you could legally refuse to testify against me for anything that may occur after we are married. And," Hannibal paused, his finger dipping down to just barely touch the ruby dark surface of his wine, "of course, I could offer you the same courtesy, should it be necessary." Finally breaking eye contact with Will, he lifted his hand and let his fingertip past his lips, sucking away a single droplet of bordeaux like he wished it was blood. Only after he'd released it with a barely there *pop* did Will look away too.

"You're suggesting that I may do something worth testifying against," Will said softly, keeping his eyes trained on some unimportant spot in the distance, eyes unfocused.

"You already have, and on this very night in fact. Was I to assume that Alana would be your last?"

"Don't." Will met his gaze sharply, eyes cold and words even colder. "Don't say her name."

"Why, praytell? Do you think she can hear me?" Hannibal mused, folding his hands in front of him the way he always did when he knew he was testing a boundary, Will's hackles rising at the way his eyes darkened. "I checked her body while you were waiting in the car, you know. You did admirable work- though given the circumstances I suspect she took at least 10 seconds to pass on, perhaps even longer. Just long enough to truly process what you'd do-"

Will was firmly on his feet and crossing around the island to where Hannibal sat before he could even process his own movements, snatching Hannibal's half-empty glass and smashing it against the edge of the marble countertop before taking a fistful of his hair in one hand and holding the jagged edge of the broken glass against his throat with the other. Hannibal could only smirk, even when the hand in his hair tightened to a painful degree.

"*Don't* ," Will repeated, punctuating it with pressing the glass so firmly into Hannibal's skin that he began to see a thin line of red spring up from the edge, one heavy ruby droplet slipping down the inside of the glass and mingling with the miniscule remnant of wine at the base. "You should know that it's not smart to piss off your future husband when he hasn't even given you an answer yet."

The smirk grew. Fucking *bastard*.

“Haven’t you?” Hannibal retorted simply. Will held their position for what felt like an eternity, looking just above Hannibal’s eyeline and finding a perfectly suitable freckle to keep his gaze on while he questioned whether or not it would be better for his health if he took the opportunity to slit his throat while he still had it. He held firm for a few moments longer, letting the thought of The Chesapeake Ripper himself managing to evade justice for decades only to die from getting his carotid artery severed by his *own wine glass* comfort him for as long as he could before giving a shaky sigh and stepping back, placing the now useless glass back on the counter. With the release of that deeply held breath went the last of Will’s energy, he realized, as he rubbed his hands over his face and up through his hair. It was late, far too late, and though he’d grown rather used to exhaustion, this kind of weariness was marrow deep and unshakeable, something he simply could not handle on top of wading through this particular pile of shit Hannibal decided to toss at his feet. When he looked up and finally met Hannibal’s gaze again, he couldn’t decide whether to grumble or preen at the pride burning in his eyes.

“...I killed a friend tonight,” he said bluntly. “I left my whole life behind. My dogs, my career. I have no idea what we’ll do, or where we’ll go. When we figure that out, you can ask me again.”

Hannibal remained quiet for longer than Will felt comfortable with, the thickness of the silence choking its way into his lungs, not at all unlike the humidity of his childhood summers lived in Louisiana. His expression was oddly uncertain, all pinched eyes and crooked frown, and it made Will uneasy just to look at. He averted his eyes, bringing his glass back up to his lips and letting the whiskey coat his tongue with oaky sweetness as he did his best not to think too hard on what Hannibal may be thinking about. When he’d finally gulped down the last of what Will had to admit was a *damn* good scotch, he still waited a second or two longer before turning back to face the island, heart catching painfully in his throat when he saw that Hannibal was back to being as plainly calm as he always was, his expression betraying no particular kind of emotion and his person suit sewn up tight.

“It shall be as you say, then,” he acquiesced simply, casting his eyes downward to where the majority of his bordeaux splattered haphazardly across the base of the island and his hardwood floors with a mild grimace. “Do you plan on cleaning this up?”

“Not a chance.”

“I see.”

“Is that all, or can I go find somewhere to pass out?”

“You are free to rest whenever you choose to, Will, but I can show you to yo-”

“Thanks but no thanks, I’ll find it myself. I’m sure it’s whatever room doesn’t have an entire suit of armor in the corner.”

Hannibal was silent, and this time it brought Will nothing but joy. Knowing of both Hannibal’s incredible distaste for the rude and the unique bond in which he and Will shared, it was growing increasingly more entertaining to antagonize him, knowing that if it were anyone else, their intestines would be used for sausage casing before the night was up. It

brought a smirk to his lips, knowing that Hannibal could be just as entertaining for Will as Will was for him; in fact, it may be the first pursuit in life they share entirely as equals. *The first of many*, Will hoped, the words tiny and quiet in the back of his mind where he knew he could pretend they didn't exist for at least a little while longer. Without another word, he began his retreat further into the house, though not without first watching as Hannibal, never one to not have the last word, lifted the broken remnant of his glass still containing the meager remnants of his wine mixed with his own blood to his lips, and swallowed it all. Will pretended not to have paid him any mind, of course, but the slight stutter in his step as he left the room would tell Hannibal all he needed to know. Biting back a swear, he tried not to feel as if Hannibal's smirk was following him as he made his way down the hall, poking his head into different rooms until he finally found what looked to be a simple guest room, painted with greys and soft blues with a plain but comfortable looking bed that was aggressively calling his name. Barely managing to toe off his shoes before he hit the mattress, he groaned in relief at the comfort that threatened to swallow him wholly into unconsciousness. In that moment, the weight of the night's events fell heavily upon him like a weighted blanket, sleep quickly overtaking him before he could even manage to slip under the covers.

-o0o-

A stag, antlers dripping with blood and the fur around his mouth near black with it as he hovers over another of his kind, wounded and panting heavily where he was sprawled across the asphalt. Will watched silently, blankly, unsure whether the display was supposed to make him feel any particular way, when he felt the damp softness of a nose nuzzle his hand. Turning, he found a young female, appropriately doe-eyed yet carrying herself with a strength Will couldn't attempt to understand in the face of the bloodshed to which they were both forced to bear witness. He was intrigued by her, this young doe, the way she seemed less disturbed by the attack itself than the fact that this particular stag was perpetrating it. Her friend? Her mate? No...no.

His.

Only his.

They have to get away.

They have to-

He grabbed the doe by the head and snapped her neck and everything went white, and for a moment the only thing Will could feel was the utter satisfaction and adoration of the bloodstained stag.

He started with a sharp cry, mind groggy and breath coming in quick pants as he sat up in this too unfamiliar bed with his fingers white knuckled where he gripped the bedspread. Other than distress, the first thing Will recognized he felt was the discomfort from having slept in a damp pair of jeans for what had to have been only a few hours, as the sun was just barely beginning to rise and send the early morning light past the edges of the curtains.

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me," he groaned, as if being woken from a nightmare was anything new. Quickly shucking off his jeans with a semi-contented sigh, he slid under the

blanket and rolled over to face the window, ready to resign himself to a fitful morning of attempted sleep, when his ear perked up at the sound of his door creaking open slowly- whoever was sneaking in clearly did not wish to be heard. He let his eyes slide shut, cursing himself for having left his pocket knife resting snugly in his back pocket, and listened for any further movement to assess exactly what he was dealing with.

When the corner of the bedspread was lifted and a warm, solidly male body slid in to spoon him from behind, Will was honestly not sure whether he wished it had been Jack Crawford coming to lock him away for life.

“You know, it’s rude to invade someone’s bed while they’re sleeping,” Will grumbled, stiffening when Hannibal slid an arm around his waist and tugged him closer, the skin of his back resting flush against Hannibal’s chest.

“You weren’t asleep,” Hannibal answered, his breath rushing over the back of Will’s neck in a way that was not entirely unpleasant. “I heard you from down the hall when you woke.”

“And you didn’t think to ask before coming in to *spoon* me?”

“It’s simply something you’ll have to get used to after we’re married, I’m afraid.”

Will paused at that, the memories of their conversation in the kitchen flooding back to him. If Hannibal was trying to test the waters, to take their sham marriage for some kind of test drive, he was doing a shitty job of it. But if he was responding to his distress, had some genuine desire to comfort him, to soothe him back to sleep with his warmth...he was still doing a shitty job of it.

“You have to ask,” Will countered, still stiff as a board in Hannibal’s arms. “Even if we sign the damn papers, you still have to ask.”

“Very well,” Hannibal acquiesced, though his voice was light with a teasing lilt. “May I hold you, Will?”

The firm kick to the shin followed by Will decidedly not moving from his arms was a satisfying enough answer for Hannibal to chuckle and settle more firmly into the mattress, happy to feel Will slowly relax in his grasp.

“I’m glad we’re doing this this way,” Will admitted quietly. “It makes it easier to talk about...everything.”

“You wish to do that now? I thought perhaps you’d like to sleep for a little while longer before we discuss something so important.”

“You’re not going to sleep,” Will said dryly, though with a chuckle. “You wouldn’t, not when you know you’re the first and only person to get to experience me in this way. The novelty of it all, the chance to study something not yet seen by any other human being, will be too much to pass up. You’re going to stay awake, watching me the entire time, memorizing every little way my body reacts to this to fill another room in your memory palace. If you think I can fall

asleep knowing I'm acting as your guinea pig for the morning, you might want to get your head checked to see if Jack gave you a concussion."

If Will knew any better, he would've thought that he'd stunned Hannibal into silence when he didn't immediately answer him, but he knew Hannibal was long past being surprised by the range of his empathy. No, this was something else entirely.
"You truly do have a beautiful mind, Will," Hannibal murmured, and for a moment, Will was sure he felt the barest of brushes of Hannibal's lips against the nape of his neck as he spoke and struggled not to shiver. He was *not* used to this kind of thing. "It's one of the reasons why I imagine married life with you will not be the death sentence you assume it will be."

"It won't be a death sentence," Will countered, one hand coming to rest by his head, his fingers tugging idly at a few of his own curls. Despite his obvious willingness to go along with the idea, he knew he couldn't hide his distaste for it. "You won't let me die, if you can help it. But it's going to be uncomfortable, Hannibal. You know that."

"Speak for yourself, Will," Hannibal retorted in that stupid fucking haughty tone, damn him. "It would be an honor for the world to think of me as your husband. And the legal benefits would be beneficia-"

"Don't you remember I prefer sins of omission, Dr. Lecter?" Will spat, pulling out of Hannibal's arms and flipping over to unamusingly meet his eyes, the sight of the thin little cut on his throat only mildly assuaging. "You want something. Something else, something you haven't told me. I might be able to refuse to testify for anything *after* our marriage, but there's plenty they could force out of me from just the last two weeks that would get you 20 to life. And honestly, how do you propose we even go about getting married? At this point, you are a wanted fugitive, and I'm either seen as your hostage or your accomplice, so we can't exactly waltz in to the nearest city hall and expect to land anywhere but in FBI custody. You've been one step ahead of law enforcement in *several* countries for *decades,* yet you don't seem to be thinking clearly now." At that, he chuckled wryly. "Shit, maybe I was right, and Jack really did smack you around a little too hard."

God, was Will fucking *elated* to watch Hannibal's eyes pinch ever so slightly with annoyance. He knew better than anyone that Hannibal *never* made any kind of decision without a plan, let alone something as life-altering as marriage, but Will simply could not help antagonizing him when the result was so gratifying, the great and stoic Hannibal Lecter openly displaying his own displeasure, if only slightly. Even if there was no one else to bear witness to his triumph, he felt victorious nonetheless.

"While I'm entertained by your obvious attempts at irritating me, Will, you know better than to question my judgement," Hannibal said. "Regardless of your answer, our next courses of action are largely planned out. All I need to know is where you wish to go."

"So it's up to me, then," Will sighed. "...You do realize that spousal privilege really isn't going to make that much of a difference for either of us at this point, right?"

"In court, it likely won't," Hannibal agreed. "But there is something to be said for the fact that from here on out, knowledge of our endeavors can remain our own, and no one else's. I

personally believe that the FBI has no right to intimate access to our family's private affairs, don't you?"

Well *now* he was getting somewhere, Will thought. The idea of Jack Crawford getting to open up his little files and pour over the details of their new life made his skin crawl. Sure, he'd piece it all together eventually, but the words would not be their own, and to Will, it was a small but meaningful comfort.

"Yeah, I do," Will sighed. "There's something else, though, isn't there?" At that, Hannibal chuckled.

"You see me more easily than anyone ever has, dear Will," he admitted. "I believe that it will be the most beneficial for Abigail's well being for her to truly see us as her fathers, her family. Knowing that we are legally bound in matrimony will likely be the most efficient way for her to accept the permanence of this new life, providing her with stability in what will undoubtedly be a very tumultuous transition for her. Furthermore, when ingratiating oneself into a new environment under false pretenses, it is best to have to lie as infrequently as possible. I believe that it will be easier for both of us to assume our new identity as a married couple with a loving daughter if we have the paperwork to back it up. We will greatly reduce our likelihood of being caught if we can fully immerse ourselves in the identities we will create while in public. Additionally-"

"Jeez, that's enough, I didn't ask for an essay. Did you get that peer reviewed before you came in here?" Will teased dryly. Letting out a playful huff, Hannibal could only smile. Will paused for only a second, contemplative, before he turned back over to his original position, lifting his arm as an obvious invitation that Hannibal took, spooning back up behind Will and letting his arm wrap snugly around his waist. "...Do you have a ring?"

"I thought I was to wait until we determined where-"

"*Do you have a ring?*"

A gentle sigh. "Yes."

"Do you have it with you?"

Rather than answer verbally, Hannibal simply reached into the pocket of his pajama pants and pulled out a small, navy blue velvet box. Flipping it open with one hand revealed a simple ring, likely platinum, traditional in every way except for the delicate etching of antlers on its surface. In that moment, Will struggled to swallow down the knowledge that this ring didn't belong to whatever alias he would concoct: this ring belonged to *him*.

"...Are you going to ask me again, or do I have to do all the work around here?"

Chuckling under his breath, because of course Will couldn't restrain himself even moments before his own engagement, Hannibal pulled the ring out from the box and steadied it just above Will's ring finger.

"My dear Will...will you marry me?"

“...Yes.”

The ring slid home, and somewhere, in the back of his mind, so did Will.

Chapter End Notes

Will Graham is a rude little gremlin and I will take that to my fucking grave.

Expect more soon, my lovelies! Can't wait to hear what you think <3

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will realizes some important things. Abigail learns the happy news. Plans are made.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! I'm so sorry this chapter took so long, I was dealing with finals week for grad school and then a whole bunch of moving and work stress, but I'm back and here with a new chapter! Please enjoy Will's inner turmoil <3

Will hadn't been lying when he said sleep would be a faraway thing while under Hannibal's scrutiny, but that didn't stop his body from falling lax in the other man's arms, his breathing slowing to fall in time with the steady rise and fall of Hannibal's chest. He'd suspect him of having fallen asleep if he didn't know any better, but against his newfound desire to inconvenience and aggravate Hannibal at every turn, Will did his best to keep still, to give them both the rest they needed after a night of bloodshed and instability.

Somehow, it was the latter of the two that bothered Will the most.

The ghost of Alana still haunted him, and he was sure that in some way, it always would. Not since the night he had consumed and displayed him had Will spared even a passing thought to the memory of Randall Tier, but one does not so easily wash away the stench of guilt from the murder of a friend. Unless, of course, you were Hannibal Lecter, who was likely more concerned for Jack's blood in the fibers of his tailored dress shirt than under his fingernails. Of course, it was highly unlikely that any of Jack's blood remained on any part of Hannibal, and yet his hands, wrapped around Will's body and curled into where the fabric of his shirt stretched across his chest, stank to him of copper and betrayal.

He wished he'd been there to see it.

Regardless, he'd regret until the day he finally died that his own course of actions necessitated Alana's death, at his own hands no less, but Will thrived on routine and security, and the lack of either in the current moment was proving the most distressing, his leg begging to bounce with a nervous tic. Slowly, taking care not to disturb Hannibal in the unlikely chance that he was asleep, he lifted his left hand to his face, rubbing with a burdened sigh.

The cold metal of his ring dragged along his skin with a shock enough to pull a sharp gasp from his chest, freezing him in place as the sound seemed to ring in his ears. If Hannibal were

awake, he didn't seem to give a response, remaining as still and quiet against Will's back as ever. Letting out a softer, relieved breath, he pulled his hand away enough to get a look at his, Christ, *engagement* ring. With the freedom now to get a closer look, Will found himself at a bit of a loss; the ring was simple, entirely unlike something he could imagine Hannibal buying. Though at first glance he'd assumed it to be platinum, he could see now that the metal had a slightly darker color compared to what he remembered of his father's wedding band, a plain platinum ring that sat tarnished and long unworn in a box in Will's closet. It was tungsten, most likely- darker than platinum, incredibly durable, and, bizarrely in this instance, incredibly affordable. The engraving, a flawlessly delicate pair of proud antlers etched into the metal with such thin lines that he wondered how it was even accomplished, was the only detail to the ring that Will could see. He couldn't imagine Hannibal spent more than $200 on it, and though Will wasn't exactly the leading expert in wedding jewelry, when Hannibal had proposed he'd half expected to be presented with a several thousand dollar ring with a diamond so heavy it made it difficult to lift a finger. He'd been so sure that was exactly how Hannibal would want him- helpless and at his mercy, bedecked in ostentatious finery, effortlessly claimed with a ring that declared "I take care of what's mine." This may have been nothing but a necessary legal arrangement, but Hannibal Lecter was a possessive man for lovers and business assets alike. However, the ring that now sat on his finger *screamed* of Will Graham. Tungsten was an exceptionally practical material for a man whose hobbies involved tinkering with his hands, while the price point and simplicity of the design made the ring feel like more of a comfort than an extravagance. It was honestly something he could've imagined choosing for himself, had he gotten the chance to, and it was precisely that thought that turned on a light bulb above Will's head: it wasn't exactly that the ring wasn't fancy enough for Hannibal's tastes that bothered him, but that Hannibal had entirely *ignored* his own tastes in favor of Will's preferences and, stranger than that, *comfort.* He'd given up the chance to shower Will with gold and diamonds of the most opulent sort, just so that Will would feel comfortable with Hannibal's ring on his finger.

It was thoughtful. It was almost kind.

And it screamed of insecurity.

"Your thoughts are almost deafening." And just like that, he was pulled back to the real world, where Hannibal's presence was still warm and firm against his back. "One wonders how you ever sleep at all, when the gears in your mind grind at such a volume."

"Well, my apologies for ruining your beauty sleep," Will grumbled, though made no effort to move. "Unless of course, you've been watching me this entire time." Though he couldn't see it, he could practically *feel* Hannibal smiling behind him.

"You seem to see yourself as quite the hot commodity." And *oh*, that bastard could go right to hell. *Almost kind my ass.* "Should I be concerned that your pendulum has swung away from self deprecation and more extremely in the opposite direction?"

"I don't think narcissism is in my wheelhouse, Dr. Lecter," he retorted. "You seem to be the leading expert, why don't you consult your own professional opinion?

"It takes a narcissist to be engaged to a narcissist, wouldn't you say?"

Will was struck silent. It was the first time since he'd said yes only a few hours prior that their engagement was brought up, and though it was getting easier to come to terms with, hearing it referenced aloud still felt incredibly odd.

"About that," he began, and against his better judgement, turned in Hannibal's arms to face him, feeling them settle with hands pressed firmly to the small of his back. "How long have you been planning for this?"

"The morning after you brought me Randall Tier's body, I came here to enlist Abigail's help in purchasing a ring that would suit your tastes. She was ecstatic at the development."

"...Hannibal, what did you tell her?"

A pause, then a small, entirely too self satisfied smile.

"When I arrived here that morning, she interrogated me rather aggressively on the outcome of that unfortunate business with Randall. In my satisfaction, I may have embellished the story beyond what could be considered true." At that, Will let out a raspy, rueful chuckle.

"You know, your language is the most flowery when you're trying to avoid angering me. Are you so terrified of my retribution?"

Whatever amusement he felt in that moment faded as Will saw something shift in Hannibal's eyes, something so *base* that it held his gaze in a death grip, like a maw of pointed teeth locked around his throat.

"I assure you, dear Will," Hannibal murmured, "Your wrath in its fullness would be something no man could be worthy of witnessing. I can only hope that when you finally unleash the monster inside of you, that I may be the first to see you bare your fangs."

The teeth around his throat tightened. Will nearly moaned.

What was wrong with him?

"Most people would argue that monsters are meant to be caged," he rasped, so soft he could almost pretend he hadn't said it. And he wished he hadn't, really, not when Hannibal gave him a grin so reverent it felt wasted on a sweaty middle aged man along with a gentle stroke of his fingertips down Will's cheek as if he were appreciating a fine sculpture.

"A world full of snakes would hate and fear the mongoose, would it not?" he countered softly. "But their opinions matter very little once they've been devoured."

Will has had innumerable moments of tension with Hannibal, but this...if Hannibal tending to the wounds on his knuckles felt like drowning, and standing in his kitchen rain drenched and aching felt more like standing at the gates of hell, then laying in his arms being admired like art was like being laid bare and flayed to the bone. Hannibal always seemed to know just what to say to make him feel seen, understood, cared for…

"Loved."

Shit. *Shit*.

“Pardon me?”

His thoughts hadn’t had time to catch up with his mouth, his tongue forming all too easily around the word, the *concept* bouncing around inside his head. Hannibal felt some kind of love for him, that much was obvious- he’d planned his escape and subsequent life on the run with Will in mind, going so far as to be willing to marry Will in an effort to keep him safe, to keep them together with Abigail, and though he often found a source of entertainment in keeping Will on his toes, discomfort was not truly his goal. On the contrary, Hannibal was insecure enough about Will’s commitment to the life of a wanted criminal, to *him*, that he made whatever little gestures he could to make Will happy, including purchasing a ring that he likely saw as below his impossibly high standards because he knew it was what Will would prefer. He wouldn’t have been surprised if Hannibal had even bought that delicious scotch from the night before just so Will would have something he’d enjoy drinking after they made their escape. This Hannibal, so concerned for Will and his desires, was an entirely different monster than the one he had come to know, one that would prefer to purr rather than snarl.

“A-Abigail. You told her you loved me?” *Sure Will, great save, I’m sure he didn’t notice.*

“I did,” Hannibal admitted with a small nod. “And now, Will, you must act as if you love me all the same.”

Though his words did not betray it, his eyes were squinted into a questioning stare that made something stir in Will’s stomach. An ache, dull and empty, a hunger unlike any he’d experienced before, swirled inside of him the longer he held Hannibal’s gaze, blood rushing to fill the pale skin of his cheeks. Fuck, what was happening to him? He could feel it again, the sensation of fangs slowly closing around his throat, but this time it took everything in him not to beg Hannibal to snap his jaws shut and tear at his flesh to paint a masterpiece on the sheets with his blood. His hand twitched, aching to lift to his throat to see if he could somehow feel the sharpness of those pointed teeth-

“Will, Hannibal!” Abigail called out from down the hall. “I made breakfast!”

He came back to his senses the second he heard Abigail’s voice.

Fuck, there was something *seriously* wrong with him.

“Well, it would be rude to refuse our first breakfast as a family,” Hannibal said as he pulled away from Will and slid off the bed, showing no indication in expression or tone that he’d realized anything was amiss. Will knew he couldn’t be that lucky, or at least that lucky for very long, so he laid still for a moment, willing his blush to subside and his breathing to even out as Hannibal straightened out his slightly wrinkled pajamas. “Will you be joining us?”

“Y-yeah, I just need a minute to throw on some new clothes,” he stammered, God he sounded like a fucking teenager before his first date.

“Of course, I’d be offended if you didn’t,” Hannibal said, “I took the liberty of stocking the closet with a myriad of options in your size. I hope they will be to your satisfaction.”

And just like that, he was gone, leaving the door open a crack for the delicious aroma of sizzling bacon and fried potatoes to waft in, enticing Will to focus on his hunger for food rather than...whatever that was. Rubbing a hand over his face with a sigh, he rolled gracelessly out of bed and strode over to the walk in closet. Inside, to his pleasant surprise, there was a complete wardrobe hung in neat rows: everything from formal suits and ties of more colors and patterns than he knew existed, to enticingly soft cashmere sweaters and, God bless him, *flannels*. A particularly warm looking green and blue checkered piece was calling his name, but just when his fingertips were about to brush the sleeve, he paused, looking down at his outstretched hand to where his ring sat snugly around his finger.

Hannibal had made an effort to prioritize Will’s desires over his own. Maybe he could return the favor.

With a deep breath, he turned instead to a fuzzy, pastel blue knit sweater that felt as expensive as it looked, pairing it with a crisp white button up and humming contentedly at the way it hugged the contours of his body and warmed the skin that had rapidly cooled once he was released from Hannibal’s arms. Below the hanging shirts and jackets were a few rows of drawers, one of which he slid open to reveal meticulously folded pairs of jeans in a variety of washes. The first pair he grabbed were dark and clearly tighter fitting, which was *much* farther outside of Will’s comfort zone than he had planned on going, but he was far too hungry and impatient to keep searching for something looser, so he begrudgingly tugged them up his legs, needing a few good hops to fully pull them on. On his way out of the closet towards the bedroom door, he passed a full length mirror against the wall and paused, giving himself a once over. Despite his unkempt hair and sallow complexion, he thought he looked pretty decent- a bit unlike himself, but the clothes were flattering enough that it made up for the strangeness. In a situation as bizarre as the one he found himself in, a bit of extra strangeness wasn’t entirely unwelcome, but nevertheless, he hoped Hannibal would recognize and appreciate the gesture.

“Will, your food is getting co- *woah.*”

Will whirled towards the door to see Abigail, a spatula glistening with oil still clenched in her fist as she looked him up and down with a giddy grin.

“I...know it’s not-”

“You look *incredible!*” she exclaimed happily, rushing to his side with excitement. “This has to be for Hannibal, right? He told me the good news- I mean, he wanted to wait for you, but I begged him to tell me and just...I’m really glad we’re gonna be a family.”

Her elation was so entirely genuine that guilt began to form a lump in Will’s throat that threatened to choke him. Had Hannibal even considered what her reaction would be when the truth inevitably came out? Was he concerned for how they might break her heart, or was he just curious what she might do? Hannibal had put so much thought into making Will comfortable, yet had seemingly disregarded the future impact their actions could have on their daughter, either caring more about keeping Will chained to his side than her wellbeing,

or acting on some deluded notion that the pain of learning that her surrogate parents lied to her about their own marriage would lead her towards some otherworldly “becoming”. And the worst part was, Will hadn’t even considered until that very moment just how badly this could affect her if everything fell apart. He fought to keep the anger building inside of him, both at Hannibal and at himself, from showing on his face, forcing a warm smile to his lips for Abigail’s sake while he began to daydream of the most satisfying way to wring Hannibal’s neck when he got a hold of him.

“I am too. I really, really am,” he replied, internally sighing with relief when her delight only grew. Quickly, she took his hand and dragged him out of the room and down the hall, where he saw Hannibal lounging comfortably at the kitchen island, lifting a forkful of perfectly fried hashbrowns to his lips. Will could feel the moment Hannibal’s eyes landed on him, the weight of his gaze growing heavy as it dragged up and down his body, his fork paused comically in the air while he drank in the sight of Will like a man starved. The unnerving combination of the desire to preen at Hannibal’s admiration and follow through with what he'd nearly done at that island the night before made Will twitch where he stood.

“What do you think? He looks good right?” Abigail said delightedly, seemingly ignorant of Will’s discomfort as she eagerly grabbed hold of his upper arm.

“Indeed he does,” Hannibal agreed, letting warmth seep into his voice likely for Abigail’s sake rather than Will’s. “I’ll have to buy a dozen sweaters exactly like this one so you will never run out.”

“For your benefit, of course,” Will retorted, letting a flirtatious lilt color his voice despite the way it made his stomach churn. Hannibal matched him in kind with an adoring grin, reaching out to offer his hand to Will. Forcing down a grimace, Will took the hand, letting Hannibal drag him in close to wrap an arm snugly around his waist.

“You see right to the core of my selfishness, I’m afraid. It is hard to resist you when you look so handsome, *mylimasis*,” he crooned, his thumb rubbing circles into Will’s lower back. Will stiffened, immediately torn between leaning further into Hannibal’s touch and wrenching himself away, as acting out their lie in front of Abigail was proving even more enraging. He forced himself to stay perfectly still and relax his tense muscles, bucking up his courage to lean down and press a soft, lingering kiss to Hannibal’s forehead.

“Later, you and I are having a *talk*,” he hissed against Hannibal’s forehead, quiet enough that he hoped Abigail wouldn’t hear him. Hannibal nodded minutely and, momentarily satisfied, Will pulled away, moving around the island to grab the plate Abigail fixed for him and seating himself next to Hannibal.

“Listen, I’m glad that you guys figured stuff out, but you’re not gonna be gross and in love all the time now, are you?” she asked teasingly, standing across the island from them and beginning to dig into her own food.

“I don’t think that’s anything you need to be worried about,” Will retorted, trying to keep his snark to a minimum as he shoved a forkful of scrambled eggs into his mouth. Letting his eyes dart to the side for just a second, he could see a satisfied grin gracing Hannibal’s lips as he continued to eat, *God I could just kill him right now and be done with it.*

“You’re lucky I don’t plan on us ever returning to this property after your incident with the wine last night, Will,” he piped up, eyes flicking down to where the burgundy stains stood out against the pale wood. “This kitchen island was handcrafted with wood from a 550 year old maple tree downed in a horrible storm that hit Strasbourg in the 1870’s.”

“Christ, even the wood has to have a story,” Will snorted, pulling a giggle from Abigail. He smiled ruefully, letting the sight of her alive and well and happy soothe his ire for the time being. “That’s something we have to talk about, though- where are we going? We don’t have much time left before someone manages to track us down.”

“Well, I wanted both of your inputs on the suggestion, but I was hoping you’d be open to Florence. I own a lovely apartment overlooking the city, and I spent much time there as a young man. There’s so much that I could show you, so much that we could do.”

Will paused for a moment, considering the option. Truly, he hadn’t been particularly concerned with where they ended up, so long as they could escape without being caught, and looking across the island, Abigail seemed to be excited by the idea of waking up in the morning and drinking espresso on a balcony overlooking a quaint Italian city, or whatever it was teenage girls fantasized about when daydreaming of Europe.

“You don’t think we’ll get caught?” he asked.

“So far, the only man who has come close to catching me in nearly 30 years has been you, *mylimasis*,” Hannibal said fondly, reaching out to rest his hand high up on Will’s thigh...completely out of Abigail’s sight. “With you at my side, I don’t think we have anything to worry about.”

Looking to Abigail, he could see that she had her eyes locked pleadingly on his, and nowhere near where Hannibal’s hand rested almost teasingly on his leg- this touch wasn’t for the sake of their lie, or he would’ve made it more obvious for Abigail to notice. No, this touch was purely and completely for Will, and it spoke to him- *trust me, be with me, believe in me*.

And Will, despite the frustration burning in his chest, at the absolute *apex* of his own stupidity, did just that.

“...Florence it is.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Will deals with his feelings thanks to some fatherly advice.

Chapter Notes

Happy Beginning of Summer, my northern hemisphere friends! Please enjoy Will having a big ol' gay panic for this entire chapter, the poor thing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Just because I agreed to Florence doesn’t mean I’m not still mad at you.”

After a long day of planning out their travel plans for the next night, they’d retired for the evening, Abigail meandering lazily back to her room with a playful admonition to “keep it down”. Will had followed Hannibal back to the master bedroom, finding it to be as infuriatingly ostentatious as he’d expected, and was now pacing the room with a clenched jaw and an annoyed glare. *Oh sure, they’ll keep it down*.

“You seemed rather agreeable to our arrangement this morning,” Hannibal replied calmly, though with a hint of innuendo that made Will’s feet stutter as he paced. “What’s changed?”

“I came to my senses, *that’s* what’s changed. You can’t possibly think that it won’t break Abigail's heart when she eventually figures out that we're not really a couple- and she *will* figure it out, Hannibal, you know that.”

“Of course I do,” and God, he sounded so nonchalant that Will could strangle him. “Abigail is a brilliant young woman, our ruse can only last for so long under her scrutiny.”

“So what?” he threw back, wheeling back towards where Hannibal had perched himself on the edge of his bed. “You decided to make Abigail the center of your newest mind game, expecting that it wouldn’t piss me off? Or are you so eager to experience my wrath that you’re getting a head start at incurring it?”

Hannibal, to his credit, had the decency to look chastened, and convincingly so. If Will were easier to manipulate like he’d once been, if he hadn’t had *extensive* experience in deciphering Hannibal’s performances, he’d almost be fooled.

“You should know by now that I have no interest in causing Abigail further pain, Will.”

“No? I guess cutting off her ear and feeding it to me was enough to satisfy you, then,” he spat, throat tightening around the sudden emotion threatening to spill past his lips.

There was so much more he could say, so much more he *wanted* to say, but knowing Abigail was only a wall away was enough to help him pause, despite the fact that his mind was flooding with every memory of Hannibal’s manipulations, his betrayals, his *neglect*, to the point where it was almost as if his encephalitis had returned to set his brain alight. There was *so much* that Will had buried away in order to focus on his and Hannibal’s personal game of chess, only for it to start clawing its way back to the surface now that their kings were locked in a stalemate.

With no strategy left to distract him, Will Graham was left with what, deep down, he’d always known- that Hannibal Lecter could not be trusted.

And yet…

“You let me know you, Will. I see you with the utmost clarity, to the depths of who you are. Your show of paternal anger is admirable, truly, but it is altogether misleading, and we both know it. Now, why don’t you tell me how you really feel?”

Checkmate.

“This isn’t one of our sessions, Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal, as infuriating as ever, simply sat in silence and waited.

“...I’m frustrated. I’m frustrated that you just...orchestrated this *entire* thing and seemingly overlooked Abigail’s needs...”

Except that wasn’t true. Not entirely anyway, and Hannibal could tell, his silent anticipation growing more tense for Will by the second.

“...and *my* needs.”

And there it was. Hannibal smiled, aglow with a fondness that permeated Will’s skin and warmed him from the inside out. There was pure satisfaction in his gaze, a fire not unlike the one Will saw in his eyes the night before in his kitchen that burned their old lives to cinders.

“Tell me what you need, Will.”

That fire spread from Hannibal’s eyes to Will’s belly and threatened to consume him on the spot. The fangs were back, grazing along the column of Will’s throat, searching for his pulse, bared and snarling and ready to snap, *yes, please, I need it-*

“I need to be your equal in this, Hannibal,” he mustered, embarrassed at the way his voice trembled. “You can’t spring stuff like this on me at the last moment just so I can be a witness to your cleverness. Whatever satisfaction you get from being in control of our lives, Abigail shouldn’t have to suffer for it. We’re both her fathers now- don’t make decisions without me when it comes to her wellbeing.”

This time, when Hannibal looked sufficiently humbled, it appeared shockingly genuine, his eyes downcast as he let out a soft sigh.

“I’m sorry, Will,” he said. “As it stands, I’m not used to sharing a life with anyone other than myself.”

“You’re not used to sharing *control* with anyone else, you mean.” At Hannibal’s surprised expression, he couldn’t help but smile. “You think after spending so long trying to get inside my head, that I hadn’t found a backdoor into yours?”

For a moment, Hannibal was quiet again, contemplative rather than anticipatory, as if examining his mind palace for where Will had carved out his own secret entrance. Will wondered, for only a second, what room Hannibal kept him in within those convoluted halls.

“Regardless,” he finally spoke up, “Though you know I am one to use apologies sparingly, I believe in this instance I must. You are not the same man I met in Jack Crawford’s office a lifetime ago, and I apologize for treating you like him.”

It was a shitty apology, as far as most apologies go, but what else could Will ask for? Hannibal on his knees, begging for forgiveness, pledging his loyalty and servitude to Will for the rest of his days?

Well, he could certainly ask, but he doubted he would get it.

“You’re forgiven,” Will said. “For now. But you have to promise me that when the time comes to tell Abigail the truth, we will do it gently, and we will do it together.”

Hannibal nodded. “I will do what I can to keep her from harm, *mylimasis* . Emotional or otherwise.”

In response, Will wrinkled his nose. “You called me that earlier. M...mylamosis?”

“*Mylimasis*,” Hannibal chuckled. “It’s a Lithuanian term of endearment. Does it bother you?”

Endearment. Hannibal being ***endeared*** *to him…*

“That depends,” he replied cautiously. “What does it mean?”

“Beloved.”

The world seemed to slow.

“*Mano mylimasis* for *my* beloved.”

The fangs were back. Will wasn’t sure they’d ever left.

“I...I like it,” Will replied, honesty sweetening his voice like honey. “I-it, uh, it’ll make it seem more believable. If we have pet names for each other.”

“I agree,” Hannibal said, clearly pleased. “*Mylimasis* is no longer commonly used, but I’m rather fond of it. There’s a gravity to referring to someone as your beloved, the one whom you love.”

Yes, there was. Will could feel it weighing down on him where he stood.

“It fits, I think,” Will said softly. “But what will I call you?”

“Hmm...I don’t think a Lithuanian term would be best. The words are unnatural on your tongue- to others it may feel forced. No offense intended, of course.”

“None taken,” Will said, managing a small smile despite the way his heart was pounding. “An old girlfriend of mine found out I spoke Louisiana French and started calling me *mon petit chou*. Coming from her, it sounded odd.”

Hannibal’s eyes widened slightly. “You speak French?”

His smile growing, Will spoke. “*Un dialecte spécifique, mais oui. Je suis plein de surprises.*”

(A specific dialect, but yes. I am full of surprises.)

“Indeed you are,” Hannibal murmured, awed. “*Si je ne suis pas ton petit chou, Will, que suis-je?”*

(If I am not your little cabbage, Will, then what am I?)

Will paused. Or more accurately, he was frozen.

Yes, Will. What is he? What is he to you, when just the implication of his affection sends your heart racing so fast you wished he’d pin you down and claw it out of your chest? What is he, when one moment you want to kill him and another you want to feel the weight of his attention on your skin? When you murdered a friend and left your pack behind just to be seen and known and loved by the monster who snarls in harmony with the beast inside you? Who is he, to his beloved?

“Dear,” he blurted out suddenly, cutting off the near psychotic ramblings of his inner monologue. “I think dear. In French, it’s *cher*. It’s really common back in Louisiana, so...I think it would feel right.”

The way Hannibal smiled made Will’s breath stutter, plagued by the irrational fear that Hannibal had found his own secret way into Will’s mind, that he’d been lounging in a soft armchair by a fireplace sipping a cup of tea while finding entertainment in Will’s panicked thoughts. *God, he always looked gorgeous by the fire.*

“Then I am honored to be your dear,” Hannibal replied fondly. “And I am honored that you agreed to such a charade in the first place. Thank you, Will, for being willing to go to such drastic lengths to protect our family.”

Will opened his mouth to respond, to give some witty quip or deprecating barb that would revive the banter that flowed so easily with the two of them, but nothing came. The thoughts

were only getting louder now that he'd paid them a modicum of attention, steadily growing out of control the longer he could feel Hannibal's gaze dragging across his skin.

"You don't need to thank me," he replied shortly. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for Abigail."

The words that naturally followed went unsaid, yet Will could hear them anyway, and worst of all, he knew that they were true.

"And in that, we are alike," Hannibal said, all friendly decorum as if Will wasn't slowly losing his mind in front of him. "Now, though our flight only leaves tomorrow evening, I'd suggest packing before you turn down for the night. You'll find two large suitcases stored under your bed, I suspect they'll be more than enough to fit your belongings."

"Won't we have time tomorrow afternoon to pack?"

"Well, in the spirit of honesty," Hannibal replied carefully, "an old friend will be visiting us tomorrow. When we board our flight to Italy, *mylimasis*, it will be as newlyweds."

The fire in Will's belly roared, as did the beast that made a home in his mind, threatening to deafen him.

"...Isn't it bad luck to see the groom the night before the wedding?" Will murmured, feeling beads of sweat forming at the edge of his hairline.

"We do not need luck," Hannibal replied simply. "Luck is based only on chance. With me, Will, there is only certainty."

He was going to faint, fuck, he was going to *faceplant*. This was too much, too soon, not enough, *more-*

"Well then...goodnight, Hannibal."

And then he was gone, retreating to the safety of solitude in the guest room that now, after the grandiosity of Hannibal's room, felt far too ordinary. With shaky hands, he knelt to the floor and dragged out two large, dark brown leather suitcases, well crafted and obviously expensive, and moved to the closet to begin filling them. His mind, however, went elsewhere.

He was on the bank of his creek in Wolf Trap, bare feet just barely submerged in the running water and his fishing pole in hand. The sun filtered through maple tree branches adorned with bright green leaves, rustling in the gentle breeze that smelled of the forest, decaying leaves and soft, pillowy moss and everything that brought him peace. Without his waders, he felt practically naked, but the summer sun warmed the creek's water to the point that if he were careful, he could wade towards where it was deepest in nothing but an old pair of cargo shorts and feel the light of the Virginia sun freckling his skin. This was how he'd preferred to fish back home, though his fishing spot in Louisiana was a stagnant pond rather than a rushing creek; all the same, the telltale splash of water to his side signified the arrival of Beau Graham, similarly dressed with a battered fishing pole that had seen much better days.

“You don’t come here all too often anymore, boy,” his father said gruffly, focusing on baiting his hook as he spoke. “For a while, you were here everyday.”

“If you’d been where I was, Dad, you’d have run here too,” Will replied, letting his muscle memory take over as he began repeatedly casting his line towards the creek’s surface. “I got out. Life got busy, and now…”

“Now you’re runnin’ off with the man who made you run here in the first place, is that it?”

Will’s father was always blunt, but there wasn’t any hint of judgement or admonition in his tone. Perhaps it was only Will’s wishful thinking, picturing his father this way, but he always remembered Beau as a man who did his best to understand someone before he casted judgements.

“It’s not just him,” Will retorted, letting the breeze rustle his curls as he reeled in his first catch. He was always luckier in his head. “You’ve got a granddaughter now, you know.”

“Yeah, I’d always wanted a grandbaby before I kicked the bucket. Can’t say I expected to get one this way, but she’s a good egg, so you won’t see me complainin’. She’ll be good for you, boy. Give you somethin’ to care for other than that pack of yours.”

“The pack’s gone, Dad. It’s just the three of us now,” Will sighed, letting the weight of that knowledge hit him.

“Your family against the world, hm?” Beau replied, finally snagging a catch of his own. “That’s a heavy burden to carry, son. I felt it, after your mom left and you were lookin’ up at me with her eyes, askin’ where she’d gone. I wouldn’t wish that feelin’ on anyone.”

He could hear the question in his father’s voice without him having to ask it, and after reeling in an empty hook, he turned to face him completely.

“They’re worth it,” he said firmly. “My family is worth it. I’ll do anything, *feel* anything, to keep us together.”

“I’m not doubtin’ that that bright young girl is worth it, Will," Beau said. “Tell me about *him*- why, after everythin’ he put you through, that you trust him enough to throw everythin’ else away.”

“...Because he’s my friend.”

“That Alana was your friend too,” Beau hummed, continuing despite the way Will winced. “Her, you left dead on the damn stoop. What makes this one so different?”

Leave it to Dad to always ask the tough questions. Or at least, the questions Will didn’t want to answer. What made Hannibal...what made what he *felt* for Hannibal so different? It wasn’t like Will didn’t know he was attracted to men- and God, he couldn’t deny it any longer that he absolutely *was* attracted to Hannibal. The way his arms filled out every dress shirt he wore, the way he looked even more handsome when he let his bloodlust flash in his eyes, the way every word he spoke made Will wish for those terrible, *glorious* fangs at his throat to

sink into his flesh and claim him at the most basic level, all flooded his body with a warmth he wasn't sure he'd ever felt in his life. He'd always had a slight preference for women ever since he discovered he was bisexual, but there was no shame for him in feeling attraction for another man, especially not when his attraction to Alana was a pathetic ember compared to the roaring wildfire of his attraction to Hannibal.

But *Hannibal*.

Hannibal was his worst nightmare in human form, the very embodiment of the darkness he'd fought so hard to hide away. To be friends with him was one thing, to fake a marriage with him was another, but to crawl into bed with his own darkness and make love to it was unthinkable. And yet, that was precisely why Will couldn't *stop* thinking about it. Hannibal was everything forbidden and dangerous, a sharp blade Will wanted to drag his tongue across just to taste his own blood, to feel *alive*. If he could accept Hannibal, if he could *love* Hannibal, perhaps he could love himself. Perhaps he could see what Hannibal had seen, so long ago in Jack's office: the potential for greatness. Worst of all, Hannibal had forced Will into some of the most harrowing experiences of his life: standing idly by while Will's mental and physical health deteriorated, subjecting him to institutionalization despite knowing it was one of Will's greatest fears, and allowing him to believe for *far* too long that he had potentially murdered and cannibalized his own daughter. And yet, despite everything, Will wanted nothing and no one else but him. He was a pompous, sadistic, positively *infuriating* narcissist, but above all else, he was *his*.

In their never ending game of chess, Will was ready to topple his king.

"You think too loud, boy," Beau interrupted, dragging his attention back to the stream. When he flicked his eyes just slightly to the side, he could see Hannibal standing by the bank, watching silently, curiously. "Spit it out before I die of old age. *Again*."

Will swallowed roughly, and though he addressed his father with his words, he kept his gaze locked firmly on Hannibal.

"Because he knows me, and he accepts me. Is that not enough?

His father turned to him, recapturing his attention as he gave him a soft smile, the same one he'd always reserved for Will when he was alive.

"Not enough?" he asked, reaching out to clap one hand on Will's shoulder. "Son, it's *everything*."

Tears pricked at his eyes, but he ignored them in favor of pulling his father into a tight hug. He'd never hugged him enough while he was alive, and even now Beau Graham smelled of motor oil and tobacco as he hugged back equally as hard. After a moment, Will opened his eyes and looked over his father's shoulder towards the bank- Hannibal had vanished.

"I'm proud of you, boy," Beau said, cupping the back of Will's head. Will doubted that, after all he'd done, but he accepted the sentiment nonetheless as he closed his eyes again and buried his face into the crook of his dad's neck. "It might not be the life I dreamed for you,

but you found your own way. He’ll be lucky to have you, you hear me? Always remember that.”

With one extra squeeze, Beau pulled away with a fatherly smile, and slowly walked back to the edge of the creek, disappearing entirely one he left the water. For a moment, Will was alone, soothed by the sounds and smells of the forest and the burning heat of his realization.

But a man like Will Graham was never long for peace.

Icy cold reality dragged Will back to his surroundings, the guest room empty and his suitcases fully packed despite his still trembling hands. He took deep, heavy breaths as he knelt there, finally coming to terms with the situation he'd found himself in.

Will was in love with Hannibal Lecter.

He was perfectly, hopelessly, completely fucked.

Chapter End Notes

I'm very proud of Will Graham for figuring his shit out so quickly, but god is he still dumber than a sack of bricks.

Next Chapter: THE WEDDING! With a special appearance by Hannibal's "old friend" ;)

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Hannibal reflects on Will Graham. Will gets his first peek into Hannibal's past.

Chapter Notes

Hi! So I know it has been *counts fingers* oh god, 7 months. I am so so sorry for the unexpected hiatus! I'm in graduate school, and my mental health took a fairly significant dive for a long time, but I finally feel like I have the motivation to write again. I know last chapter I promised the wedding for this chapter, but there were a few things I wanted to explore before we got there. Enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For all of Will's brilliance, the singularly remarkable way he could claw his way inside your skull to see the way your neurons fired, he was not without his blind spots.

Hannibal watched as he retreated from his bedroom with all of the subtlety and grace of a stumbling elephant and could feel nothing but fondness where there was once betrayal. In a sense, he had not known exactly what he was going to do when he inevitably saw Will in the throes of his own downfall, but in the hidden hallways of his mind, he could imagine. Imagining held him together. Imagining kept him from doing something reckless.

He would liken himself to Nero, wondering aloud if he would be forgiven if he elected to pull out one of his Heifetz albums rather than play the fiddle himself while his empire burned. *Tasteless,* Will would say, and Hannibal would smile, and he would keep smiling as he sank a blade into his beloved's stomach, and perhaps smile still as Will watched him take what was his, what was *theirs*, away from him. Were he not burdened with affection for Will Graham enough to keep him alive, he likely would aim higher, carve deeper, and take the cruel boy's heart with him. His reckoning had interrupted his dinner plans, after all.

It made for quite the scene, he must admit. Hannibal Lecter VIII, a king standing triumphantly over the broken bodies of his enemies, smiling to keep from feeling his rage or his shame too deeply, breathing in the coppery scent of blood to feel less alone in the world. It was only during the drive to the cliffside house, Will sleeping soundly at his side and Abigail contemplating the rain from the backseat, that Hannibal revisited his fantasy and saw himself for who he truly was. He was neither Nero nor the victorious king, but Honorius, having nearly ruined his chance at peace by attacking prior to negotiations; knowing then what he might have missed, the imagined flesh of Will Graham's heart turned bitter on his

tongue, as if he were tasting the burning ash of his fallen Rome, and he swore that he would never allow himself the opportunity to lose them again. He'd washed the taste out of his mouth with a much needed glass of wine, only for it to be broken and turned against him when he'd tested his beloved's patience. The blood that had dripped into what was left of his glass had taken with it the pitiful remnants of his heartache, leaving only pride in its wake.

Such a wonder. No one else could deserve him.

There was much to be done in preparation for their travels, though even as he retrieved his suitcase and began packing away his belongings, Hannibal's mind stayed fixated on Will- as it always had been, and as it always would be, he realized. It was not the fledgling bird of prey just now embracing his talons that first captured his attention, but the twitchy, ill-tempered grump with a well of untapped potential for death and delight in the flash of his blue eyes. Hannibal had wondered, of course, just how deep that darkness ran, but after walking into the Hobbs' kitchen and seeing Will staring in terror and fury at the decimated corpse of Garrett Jacob Hobbs, he knew: Death itself had looked down upon Will Graham and trembled.

Looking back on the time between that day and Will's incarceration, Hannibal can admit to himself that he'd lapsed in his judgement. To say the words out loud would be another matter entirely, but deep in the recesses of his mind palace, down the corridor that resembled the dungeons beneath the home of his youth, there was a scene forever branded into his very neurons: Will in a derelict cell, dressed in his dingy jumpsuit and promising Hannibal that they would never again feel the light of friendship, those blue eyes so full of hatred. Even then, he could see despondence cooing to his beloved's budding darkness like the mother he'd never had and couldn't help but marvel at the way it nurtured him. Surprising as it may be he was indeed capable of shame, and he knew that this memory served as a warning not to mishandle Will again. Still, Hannibal could not help but choose to forgo regret, knowing that everything had led them to where they were now. All of this had been his design, as Will had once said.

Bzzz. Bzzz. Pulled from his musings, Hannibal retrieved his burner phone from his pocket, recognizing the phone number instantly.

"Hello, my dear," he answered softly, a gentle smile playing at the corner of his lips. "It has been quite some time."

"Hannibal. Did you make it out alright?"

"You need not worry for me, Chiyoh. I have sustained no injuries that were not easily tended to. What about you? It seems like a lifetime ago that I last got to hear your voice."

"I am alive and unharmed, thank you. What matters now is making sure you remain the same," she answered formally. *Always so practical,* Hannibal thought. *She truly hasn't changed much in her solitude.* "I have all of the proper paperwork in order. Your dear friend Mr. Vega at the Baltimore County Courthouse was grateful to have the opportunity to assist you in your private nuptials. News about your affairs has not spread far yet, it seems."

Hannibal doubted that strongly. Rather, he suspected those who knew him well didn't want to believe that they could have been swindled so effortlessly, or didn't want to face what they'd more than likely consumed at his table.

"I guarantee it will not last long, Jack Crawford will see to that," he said, having faith that dear Uncle Jack would survive his injuries purely out of spite. "Soon, commercial travel out of the country will no longer be an option."

"We will have no need for commercial travel," Chiyoh assured him. "Using the funds you provided, I've purchased a large enough boat for the four of us to comfortably sail for an extended period of time, along with provisions for the journey. Do you have a final destination in mind?"

Hannibal smiled softly to himself. "Florence."

A pause. "I see. This boy has made you sentimental."

"That, and more," he replied easily. "Will the boat be able to get us there?"

"Likely not. But with an experienced sailor at the helm, we could make it to Havana. I'll determine the length of our sail and book plane tickets as soon as possible." His smile only grew- he knew just the captain.

"That can be arranged. You will be joining us, won't you?" Hannibal asked, already knowing the answer.

"I'm afraid I have responsibilities at the castle that I cannot abandon," she answered firmly, Hannibal knowing all too well of whom she spoke as a grimace formed on his face. A pity- he'd implored her so many times to rid herself of her burden, yet she refused. Some part of him hoped that her own imprisonment would do for her the wonders it did for Will. "I will book my own flight from Havana and return home. But…it will be good to see you, Hannibal."

His face softened to form a smile, a genuine, fond little thing. "It will be a delight to see you again as well, my dear. Arrive early tomorrow morning, and I will have a meal prepared for you. The pantry is not as well stocked as I would like, but I will not fail to provide for you."

"Nor I you. Goodnight, Hannibal."

The call ended before he had the chance to reply. She truly hadn't changed a bit.

Naturally, Hannibal's thoughts returned to Will, particularly the nervous manner in which he'd fled the bedroom after learning that they would be married the following morning. He'd done what he could to make Will comfortable with the idea, and the lies had been acrid on his tongue as he spoke them- there was nothing about a marriage to Will Graham that he could ever consider a sham. It had done little to assuage him, but there was no indication that Will suspected him of his feelings, let alone shared them. He could see Hannibal so completely that the marrow in his bones could feel the weight of his scrutiny, and yet his affections seemed to be hidden from view- it was incredibly fascinating. Had his world-shattering

devotion to Will completely voided him of his true nature, he may have had the decency not to push the matter, or even to suggest it in the first place.

But Hannibal Lecter was not that man. And he did not want to be loved as anyone other than himself.

So the next morning, he would marry Will Graham. He would be nothing less than the doting husband his clever boy deserved, and they would love and protect their daughter the way her birth father never could. And from his place at Will's side, he would continue to whisper into his chrysalis.

He smiled. He was *so* curious as to what would happen next.

~oOo~

When Will woke, it was from a seemingly dreamless sleep, a blessing after the night he'd had. He'd heard his father's words as he'd drifted off-

*Enough? Son, it's **everything**.*

The weight of his revelation still hung heavily in his mind, though he couldn't decide whether it brought the comfort of a weighted blanket or the burden of iron chains. He loved Hannibal Lecter, that much was for certain, and in some way, Hannibal Lecter loved him. A man does not simply throw away a well-orchestrated life to go on the lam for a person they merely tolerate. And, remembering the feeling of Hannibal's gaze on his skin, he knew that he was desired, at least physically. Knowing how he looked yesterday, he thought with a strained smirk, he couldn't entirely blame him. But, he argued with himself, physical desire was not indicative of love. A young man gazes lustfully at a naked woman in a Playboy magazine and has no desire to cater to the most inner desires of her heart. Hannibal can admire aesthetic beauty, even find pleasure in it, and not love him. He could marry him today, in a few hours in fact, and not love him. In fact, he doesn't. *He doesn't love you. Do not fuel your hope. This is for Abigail. This is for your family.*

The words don't feel true, not really. But he'll take time to argue with himself when they've managed to leave the country.

Fingers shaking, he rose from his bed, unsure and uncaring of the time, and wrapped himself in his robe before making his way to the kitchen, feeling comforted by the feeling of cold, hard tile beneath the pads of his feet. He couldn't be surprised by the sight of Hannibal standing in front of the stove, as it was where he'd expected him to be when he saw the sun rising steadily in a soft pink sky. Instead, what shocked him into stillness was the sight of Hannibal whisking a bowl full of eggs dressed only in a pair of maroon pajama pants hanging lowly around his hips.

"Ah, good morning Will," Hannibal said casually as he turned to greet him. "Did you sleep well?"

His tongue felt like cotton, his lips fumbling to form his words.

“Yes, I did,” he answered, trying his absolute best not to sound as affected as he was. “Surprisingly. You’re, uh…not wearing a shirt.”

“I’m relieved to see that leaving the FBI to become a fugitive has not stripped you of your observational prowess,” Hannibal chuckled. Will gulped, forcing himself not to watch the way Hannibal’s belly flexed and relaxed as he laughed. “Yes, I spilled coffee on my shirt while gathering the ingredients for breakfast. I didn’t think anyone would be awake this early, so I hadn’t thought to change. Does it bother you?”

Yes, because you are temptation incarnate and we are not going to make it to our wedding if you insist on scrambling eggs with your body on display, you insufferable prick.

“No, no, of course not,” Will insisted, hoping he didn’t sound as utterly pathetic as he felt. “I’m just not sure I’ve ever seen you like this. It’s…” *Titillating.* “Fascinating.”

Hannibal, ever the pillar of propriety, gave him a gentle smile.

“We are to be married, Will,” he reminded him, turning back to his bowl of eggs. “Sharing a space, sharing a life, we are bound to be exposed to one another in many senses of the word.”

“Still, cover up before Abigail wakes up and sees you- it’s indecent,” he quipped, and felt warmth spread in his chest when Hannibal laughed good-naturedly as he poured the beaten eggs into a buttered skillet.

“If you would keep an eye on my eggs for me, I will fetch my robe,” he said, turning and handing Will his rubber spatula. “Do not step away for a single moment, and stir constantly, or they will not set to the right texture.”

“Right, got it,” Will mumbled, keeping his eyes downcast as he stepped up to the stove and followed Hannibal’s instructions. Monotonous physical tasks were ideal for him- they let his mind quiet and focus purely on movement. Maybe he could grow to like cooking with Hannibal, if it was this kind of task he was relegated to. The image of them side by side preparing a meal for their family was so saccharinely domestic that it made his chest ache, but no sooner was Hannibal gone than he returned, toned chest and soft belly mercifully covered.

“Thank you, Will,” he said softly, taking the spatula back. “You did wonderfully.”

The beast inside him *preened* at the praise.

“I only did what you told me to do,” he retorted. “Stirring isn’t exactly a difficult task.”

“Well, I am grateful nonetheless,” Hannibal said. “Now, if you wouldn’t mind, I believe our guest has arrived. Would you show her in, please?”

At that, Will perked up. Hannibal had been very cryptic about this “old friend” that was arriving to assist them, and despite the pit in his stomach that formed when he understood that her arrival meant their wedding would be *very* soon, he couldn’t help but be curious as to

who this mystery woman could be. Trying not to seem eager, he padded over to the front door and welcomed the rush of cold air when he opened it, watching as a slim, dark haired woman exited a perfectly nondescript car with a manila folder in hand. When their eyes met, the mutual understanding hit him like a freight train: *He's been inside your head, too*.

Gracefully, the woman made her way towards him, her heels clicking softly as she walked. He briefly worried what he must look like, having just rolled out of bed and thrown on a robe while she was so elegantly dressed, a chocolate brown peacoat hugging her delicate frame. From this distance, he could see a thick strap hanging diagonally across her torso. *A sniper rifle- no wonder Hannibal saw something in her*. Distantly, he felt a pang of jealousy, knowing this woman had appealed to him in some way, but he forced himself to push it aside for a moment as she finally stopped across from him.

"You must be Will," she said, her English softly accented. Japanese, he suspected. "I've heard much about you."

"I wish that I could say the same," he admitted, curiosity piqued somewhat by her formality. "But it's nice to meet you nonetheless."

"Likewise," she replied. "May I come in?"

Nodding, he stepped aside, allowing her to pass first before following behind her. Hannibal, now plating the eggs he'd been preparing, turned to see her with fondness glowing in his eyes. The smile he wore was different than the one he used for Will, and it was at least some comfort for him.

"Chiyoh," he said softly, closing the distance between them and holding out his hands to take hers. "You look well. How was your flight?"

"Long, but tolerable. It is good to see you looking so alive," she said, the barest hint of fondness seeping into her words. She seemed to soften with him somewhat, though without lowering her guard. "Will tells me you have not spoken of me much. Have I been forgotten, Hannibal?"

"On the contrary, you are on my mind every day," he replied, though it made something ugly twist deep in Will's belly. "Though I don't wish to be rude. Will, I'd like you to meet Chiyoh. She served as a maid to my aunt, so we spent much of our young lives together. She is now… all that remains of my family."

Family. Good, Will could do family. Saying nothing as he made a mental note of her past, he reached out to grasp her hand, shaking it gently as the reflection of a pendulum swung faintly behind his eyes.

"*Mylimasis,* would you wake Abigail? Let her know that breakfast is ready," Hannibal said. Will's eyes narrowed slightly as he saw Chiyoh tense at the sound of Hannibal's voice, almost imperceptible but not enough to escape his notice.

"Of course," he said carefully. *Tense*.

Interesting.

Will took his time making his way to Abigail's room, playing back the last few minutes in his head. Chiyoh stood motionless in front of the house, frozen in time, as Will circled her and began to speak.

"I haven't conversed with another human being in quite some time. The sight of you is as terrifying as it is exhilarating, but I keep my voice even, measured, focusing on what I know- manners. I do not offer you my name. I speak to you like I would my employer, ingratiating myself to you while still managing to keep my distance. Were it not for him, I would not be here…were it not for him, I would not be ***there****."*

"Will?"

He came back to himself with a gasp, eyes refocusing and realizing that he is in front of Abigail's door, now cracked to reveal her standing there, already put together and watching him curiously.

"Uh, I- sorry."

"It's alright," she said, somewhat fondly. "Where did you go, just now?"

He paused, contemplative. "...Lithuania, I think."

If she knew what he meant, she didn't show it. She simply sighed, patted him on the shoulder, and moved past him, leading them both back to the kitchen. Hannibal and Chiyoh were standing at the kitchen island, two plates of eggs untouched as they conversed quietly. Abigail stopped, looking back over her shoulder to send Will a confused look.

"Abigail," Hannibal said, drawing her attention. "Good. I'd like for you to meet someone."

Will stood back and watched as the two young women were introduced, studying, analyzing. The pendulum swung again.

"He didn't have anyone to protect him, then. I sometimes hear him in the dead halls of his home, peals of boyish laughter devolving into whimpers. He's a protector now, I see it in the way he looks at this girl. She…she reminds him of her, or at least she reminds him of what he could not do for her. And looking at them both, it reminds me of what I could not do for either of them…but we are not little children anymore. I will keep him safe. I will keep the monsters that haunt his nightmares concealed in the underbelly of the Earth. I will make them suffer. I will keep him safe. ***I*** *will keep him safe.*

This is my design."

With a start, Will opened his eyes, seeing Abigail had already served herself a plate of eggs sprinkled with chives and flaky salt. He sighed heavily, the savory aromas chasing away the stench of damp rot that had invaded his senses as he moved to do the same, his words replaying on a loop in his mind. Hannibal and Chiyoh had moved to the dining room, where Will could still barely make out the hushed tones they spoke in.

“She’s important to him,” Abigail piped up. Will’s hand holding the serving spoon paused in mid-air for a moment before moving again to scoop up the admittedly soft, delicious looking eggs. “You can see it in the way he looks at her. Why wouldn’t he tell us about her?”

Will hummed softly as he took his seat next to her. “So it’s not just me, then. I thought he might’ve said something to you about her while you were…away.”

“Not a word. I didn’t know he even had family still left alive.”

“Neither did I,” he agreed. “She’s…inherently woven into the fabric of his past.”

At this, she perked up, turning to him with wide, knowing eyes. “What is it? What could you see?”

“Abigail, I’m not sure this is the best time.” His eyes flicked towards the dining room, and she sighed, nodding.

“Fine. After we’ve eaten, I’m helping you get ready. You can tell me then.”

Ready…she's helping me get ready. Ready for my ***wedding.***

“...Can’t wait.”

Chapter End Notes

Stupid, stupid boys, I love you dearly.

I hope you all enjoyed this, and I absolutely promise this time that our next chapter will be the moment you've all be waiting for. Let me know what you all think, and I'll be posting again soon <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!